Medical education

Scripted role play: A technique for teaching sexual history taking

EILEEN A. SCHWEICKERT, DO
ALLISON B. HEEREN, CSW, ACSW

Many inexperienced physicians are uncertain as to how to go about gathering a sexual history. They have had courses in basic history taking, but they do not know how to go about obtaining the information in a nonthreatening way. Their opportunities for interaction with real patients have typically been limited. Scripted role play is a very effective method for providing residents with an opportunity to enhance their sexual-history-taking skills. This article describes scripted role play as a teaching method; explains why it is effective for teaching sexual history taking; presents general guidelines for script writing for this purpose; details how to organize a teaching session; and provides some tips for the session facilitator.

(Key words: Role play, history taking, sexual history, interviewing, counseling, medical education)

Scripted role play as a teaching method

Traditional didactic teaching methods are not highly effective in teaching counseling skills. Techniques like role play are significantly more effective for adult learners because they are interactive, but can be unwieldy when many trainees are involved in the educational session. Role play is also difficult to use in the typical 1-hour conference time frame. It is difficult to guide inexperienced trainees through a whole interchange and have it come close to replicating a real patient encounter. Pauses for prompting and discussion are usually frequent.

We have had success in retaining the interactive nature of role play, avoiding the problems associated with this teaching method by using prepared scripts. This technique is called scripted role play.

Teaching sexual history taking

There exist a number of teaching methods that can be used to teach history-taking skills. Role play with group discussion is one common teaching technique. It is easy to adapt when learners of varying experience are present in one group, but it has the aforementioned drawbacks. And trainees may feel anxious discussing issues related to sexuality in didactic sessions devoted to this aspect of history taking.

Scripted role play allows the resident to practice interviewing and counseling skills in a protected setting. By reading a script, the residents do not have to invent the dialog for the physician or patient role, and they do not need to reveal their personal experience or incompetence in a public manner.

We specifically use scripts instead of “off the cuff” role play to incorporate demonstration of effective interviewing techniques, while allowing residents the opportunity to practice using them. We find that using this guided structure decreases trainee discomfort with the subject matter and increases group interaction. It also makes the session easier for the facilitator to guide and anticipate logical opportunities for making specific teaching points.

Guidelines for script writing

Different scripts can be used to illustrate how to modify history-taking style based on the patient’s reason for visiting the physician. In some scripts, the patient’s chief complaint should lead logically into the sexual history. In others, the patient may be visiting the physician for a general health appraisal, or may be admitted to the hospital for an acute illness or injury. We cover situations in which the physician and the patient are meeting for the first time and encounters in which the physician and patient have an ongoing relationship. The scripts should vary the sex and sexual orientation of the patient.

Organization of the session

The facilitator should begin the session reviewing learning goals and objectives, then proceed with the first script. In a 1-hour session, typically three or four scripts can be covered with discussion between them. For the first few scripts, a resident should be asked to take the “physician” role and the faculty facili-
Stuttering Didn’t Keep Her Grounded.

Annie Glenn, wife of astronaut John Glenn, was grounded for years by a stuttering problem. Speech therapy and hard work turned it around. Today she speaks with confidence, grace, and strength.

For more information on what you can do about stuttering, write or call us toll-free.

STUTTERING FOUNDATION OF AMERICA
A Nonprofit Organization
Since 1947—Helping Those Who Stutter
www.stutterSFA.org • stuttervantek.net
1-800-992-9392

3100 Walnut Grove Road, Suite 603 • P.O. Box 11749 • Memphis, TN 38111-0749

References